

R 190024Z MAY 04

FM AMEMBASSY BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2206

INFO ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY KABUL

UNCLAS BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN 000270

DEPT FOR EAP/PMBS

ALSO FOR S/CPR AMB. ENSENAT

SINGAPORE ALSO FOR COL BORDWELL

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PREL PGOV

SUBJECT: ROYAL WEDDING ANNOUNCED

REF: BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN 255

¶1. SUMMARY: THE BRUNEI INFORMATION DEPARTMENT ANNOUNCED MAY 15 THAT THE CROWN PRINCE, HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS PRINCE HAJI AL-MUHTADEE BILLAH, 30, IS TO MARRY ON SEPTEMBER 8. HIS BRIDE-TO-BE IS AN UNKNOWN SEVENTEEN-YEAR-OLD STUDENT, DAYANGKU SARAH BTE PENGIRAN HAJI SALLEH ABDUL RAHAMAN. END SUMMARY.

¶2. THE LONG-EXPECTED ANNOUNCEMENT WAS MADE ON NATIONAL TELEVISION ON SATURDAY, MAY 15, AND COPIES OF THE BORNEO BULLETIN ON THE FOLLOWING DAY, WHICH CARRIED AN OFFICIAL PORTRAIT OF SARAH, WERE SOLD OUT WITHIN HOURS. MESSAGES CONGRATULATING THE COUPLE AND THE PRINCE'S WISE CHOICE OF A BRIDE HAVE BEEN POURING IN TO BRUNEI'S INTERNET BOARDS. THERE HAS BEEN WIDESPREAD PRAISE ALSO THAT THE PRINCE HAS CHOSEN AGAINST MARRYING HIS EARLIER RUMORED CHOICE OF PARTNER WHO ALLEGEDLY HAD TOO COLORFUL A PAST TO WITHSTAND PUBLIC SCRUTINY.

¶3. DAYANGKU SARAH IS A STUDENT AT THE PADUKA SERI BEGAWAN SULTAN SCIENCE COLLEGE AND IS STUDYING FOR HER UNIVERSITY ENTRANCE EXAMINATIONS. SHE IS THE YOUNGEST OF THREE CHILDREN. HER FATHER IS A MINOR RANKING "PENGIRAN," WHICH MEANS HE HAS SOME ROYAL BLOOD, BUT THE CONNECTION IS DISTANT. SARAH'S MOTHER IS A SWISS NATIONAL. (NOT SWEDISH AS ORIGINALLY REPORTED IN REFTEL.)

¶4. THE EMERGENCE OF DAYANGKU SARAH IS A RECENT DEVELOPMENT. AS PART OF PREPARATIONS FOR THE CROWN PRINCE'S ANTICIPATED WEDDING, HE HAS IN THE PAST SEVERAL MONTHS INCREASED HIS APPEARANCES AT PUBLIC EVENTS AND MADE REGULAR VISITS TO PROMINENT PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS. AMONG THE SCHOOLS HE VISITED WAS THE PADUKA SERI BEGAWAN SULTAN SCIENCE COLLEGE, WHERE HE MET SARAH FOR THE FIRST TIME. UPON REPORTING HIS INTEREST, THE PALACE SWUNG INTO ACTION AND DETERMINED THAT SARAH HAD MANY OF THE QUALITIES THE SULTAN AND QUEEN HOPED FOR IN A BRIDE, INCLUDING A ROYAL FAMILY CONNECTION AND NEW BLOOD FOR THE ROYAL LINE. CROWN PRINCE BILLAH, ACCORDING TO THE LOCAL RUMOR MILL, IS HEAD OVER HEELS IN LOVE WITH SARAH AND HAS COMPLETELY LOST INTEREST IN HIS FORMER LEADING BRIDE CHOICE -- OR AT LEAST THAT'S THE SPIN BEING CIRCULATED FOR PUBLIC CONSUMPTION.

¶5. COMMENT: THE EMBASSY IS WORKING WITH MFA PROTOCOL TO DETERMINE WHETHER FOREIGN REPS WILL BE INVITED AND WILL REPORT WHEN CONFIRMATION IS AVAILABLE. AMBASSADOR HAS BEEN TOLD INFORMALLY THAT UP TO 100 HEADS OF STATE/ROYALS WILL BE INVITED TO THE CEREMONY. THE OFFICIAL WEDDING PERIOD IS SLATED TO RUN FROM AUGUST 26 TO SEPTEMBER 8. KEY EVENTS WILL TAKE PLACE ON AND IMMEDIATELY BEFORE SEPTEMBER 8.

¶6. KABUL MINIMIZE CONSIDERED.

CHRISTY